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- 1 This edited volume gathers contributions discussing the situation of the Catholic Church in contemporary China. In addition to describing debates evolving around post-Maoist Chinese Catholicism, it highlights the intricate relationships among local communities, political factors, and individual personalities involved in the making of the Church in China. A particularity of this volume is to gather contributions from both academic scholars and clergy members. Thus, the strength of the book is not so much in its capacity to theorize underlying debates as in the diversity of its approaches. For instance, five chapters of the volume are written by either priests or nuns and provide insights on the ways international clergy approaches the Church in China. Similarly, the geographical origins of the contributors – mainland China, France, Hong Kong, Italy, Taiwan, and the USA – manifest well how the situation of the Church in China is a question with international relevance.
- 2 The book is divided into four parts, each focusing on one specific level of Chinese Catholicism. The first section, “Policies”, includes two contributions exploring how the Catholic Church in China has been impacted by the renewed policy of the state during the post-Maoist period. Gianni Criveller offers a detailed overview of public decisions

and statements made by the Chinese State and the Holy See concerning the Church in China. During four decades of ups and downs in the relationships between Beijing and the Vatican, divisions between a “Patriotic” (official) Church and an “underground” (un-registered) one have remained significant and continue to attract most of the international attention. Sergio Ticozzi contributes to this conversation by focusing on the gradual development of the Underground Church from the late 1970s to the early 2000s. Although the superposition of two conflicting catholic networks is highly problematic for the Holy See, the Vatican has provided various resources to the Underground Church in order to help those who refuse to officially cut their ties with the Pope. Through special authorizations, abroad study programs, and material support, numerous priests and nuns have been able to serve local Catholics, to maintain autonomous ecclesial structures, and to resist state oppression and interference. Yet, the temptation of isolation remains high and Catholic authorities struggle to prevent local communities and priests from breaking up with the larger Church. Nonetheless, the Holy See has been very vocal on its desire to maintain a dialogue with Chinese authorities to normalize the situation. Thus, this first section summarizes well how multiple dynamics are shaping Chinese Catholicism and how political factors have been at the center of most investigations. Yet, it may give the misleading impression that the Catholic Church in China is homogenously the same across the country and that divisions are necessary binary and political. In fact, while this section is extremely important to understand most highly-publicized debates, it fails to consider vast regions of the country where there is no Underground Church but only one legally registered Church which is also in communion with Rome. Simultaneously, the skepticism shared by the two Italian priests who contribute to this first part reveals how international clergy can be at odds with decisions made by either the Holy See and Beijing.

- 3 The following two chapters – section II on “People” – present the life and action of two prominent Chinese Catholic figures. First, Rachel Xiaohong Zhu introduces the work of Bishop Aloysius Jin Luxian (1916–2013) in Shanghai. Zhu shows how this pragmatic and charismatic leader had to navigate through very uncertain and rapidly-changing times. While he developed a nuanced theology on the autonomy of the local Church, an initiative that created suspicion and controversies from the wider Church, he was able to revitalize various sectors of Shanghai Catholicism. In a similar way, Beatrice Leung presents the life and ministry of Joseph Zen Ze-kun (born in 1932), the vocal and formal bishop of Hong Kong. By revisiting the various socio-political issues that Cardinal Zen has had to engage with since 2002, Leung argues that Zen stands as one of the “four modern prophets of Asian”. Effective at attracting international attention, Zen has constantly and vehemently called on Chinese authorities for the respect of human rights in accordance with a Christian interpretation of social justice. One may regret, however, that this section focuses exclusively on Catholic bishops. While those charismatic leaders deserve attention, such selection risks to sideline the importance of laypeople – I, here, think about individuals like Audrey Donnithorne – and also of the beatas, heads of Chinese families, and nuns like Betty Ann Maheu to whom this book is dedicated. Furthermore, this repetitive focus on episcopal figures reinforces the rather top-down approach of the entire book and the questionable impression that the Catholic Church is first and foremost a vertical and pyramidal institution. To move forward and to return to the prophetic Cardinal Zen, one may consider how his entire ministry has been paired with the one of Cardinal John Tong Hon. As Christ sent

disciples two by two, the Holy See has ostentatiously paired these two men of different temperaments and styles. In 1996, they have been ordained auxiliary bishop on the same day and for the very same diocese. One after the other, each became bishop of Hong Kong and then cardinal while the other was still ministering the local Church. Today, they continue to serve together in Hong Kong. Thus, one may argue that revisiting the contribution of Cardinal Zen in relation to the one of Cardinal Tong may provide a subtler and more critical understanding of the action of ecclesial ministers and the Holy See. While clergy members have each their personality and style, they are positioned within a network of collaborations, duties, and responsibilities that prevent us from reducing them to singular heroes.

- 4 The third section of the book, “Organizations”, revisits the history and action of two Chinese Catholic organizations. First, Raissa De Gruttola recalls the foundation and development of the Studium Biblicum Franciscanum Sinense by the Franciscan missionary Gabriele Allegra (1907-1976). Established in Beijing in 1945, and later relocated to Hong Kong, the Studium has played a crucial role in supporting the creation and diffusion of the first bible in contemporary Chinese language. The Sigao bible even became the official version of biblical texts used during Catholic liturgies. Over the years, the Studium has continued to support various efforts engaging with biblical studies, translation, and pastoral activities such as the creation of a dictionary of biblical terms (1975), the publication of periodicals, and the creation of a website to access biblical texts in Chinese. The second chapter turns to the Jinde Charities Foundation in Hebei Province. Zhipeng Zhang explains how this foundation emerged within the context of the post-Maoist Catholic revival and was officially named after the late Bishop Jinde who played a key role in its structuration. While Zhang lists the diverse charities that the Foundation fulfills today – such as disaster relief, centers for disabled children, orphanages, elderly homes, and so on –, he also argues that these social services allow the Chinese Catholic Church to gradually become more than a servant of the society but also a prophet. Yet, Zhang’s definition of a prophet is quite different from the one of Beatrice Leung who emphasizes the capacity to challenge and criticize established authorities, Rome and Beijing. Instead, Zhang sees the Church becoming prophetic when she builds a sense of social responsibility among citizens and implements government policies with improved efficiency.
- 5 Finally, in the fourth and last section of the book, “Communities”, two contributions discuss the ways in which subgroups and communities are taking shape within Chinese Catholicism. First, Bruno Lepeu investigates how youth ministry is gaining a renewed importance on mainland China. Lepeu shows that a new generation of Catholics shaped by the deep socio-economic transformation of the country is calling the Church to adapt its ministry. Like elsewhere in the world where modernity and capitalism are reshaping social life, young Chinese Catholics are shifting from a Catholic identity informed by rural communal belonging and ritual conformity to something in which individual positioning and internalized faith gain new importance. Consequently, Chinese dioceses and parishes are in the midst of structural transformations to welcome and respond to a new generation of Catholics. Yet, the reader may wonder why Chinese young and modern Catholics seem to advocate for change and ecclesial renewal while many of their peers in the Western world as well as in Hong Kong are turning toward more “traditional” and “ritualistic” practices within communities with clear boundary markers. The final chapter of the book is written by Paul Mariani, who investigates what is conventionally named the Sheshan “Miracle”. During the end of

1979, and after decades of intense religious persecution and state atheism, rumors spread across Eastern China announcing the appearance of Virgin Mary in the Marian sanctuary of Sheshan near Shanghai. Then, in March 1980, thousands of faithful, mostly fisherfolk, gathered at Sheshan to pray and wait for a sign. Local Catholics, clergy members, and cadres were astonished. Elaborating on an account made by a Hong Kong witness as well as a few publications from the 1980s, Mariani unpacks the miracle and discusses how it stands as an event, an experience, and a myth. Ultimately, Mariani highlights that the government could not believe that religion came back so quickly. Therefore, cadres worked intensely to reframe the narratives surrounding the “Miracle”. Yet, such a spontaneous event with a highly religious and charismatic dimension challenged all authorities and social structures. As Mariani indicates, urban Catholics and priests were also skeptical about the sudden appearance of thousands of uneducated fishermen. Thus, the analysis may benefit from considering how all forms of authorities have been threatened by this sudden breakthrough of repressed popular religiosity. Like in other sites of Marian pilgrimage across the world, a “miracle” is not only a challenge to the government but also to those who are more established and to ecclesial authority. The Sheshan “Miracle” may therefore reveal the tensions that lay not only between the Christian faith and the atheist ideology of the state, but also between lower-class, water-based, and traveling fishermen and urban-dwellers, as well as between uneducated believers and entitled clergy members.

- 6 In conclusion, this edited volume is a coherent collection of contributions with multiple layers of reading that provide a rich window on current debates on Chinese Catholicism. Its content is as rich as it is diverse. While the reader may want to keep in mind that Catholicism in China is not solely influenced by state interference but also by dynamic socio-economic transformations, popular religion, and Protestantism, this book provides well-documented and multifaceted access to most debates on the Church in China.